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FM AMEMBASSY RABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3041
INFO RUEHAS/AMEMBASSY ALGIERS PRIORITY 3799
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 2818
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 5381
RUEHNK/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT PRIORITY 3028
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 4046
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA PRIORITY 1365
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

CONFIDENTIAL RABAT 000432

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DEPT FOR NEA/MAG, NEA/PPD, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/01/2009

TAGS: MO PGOV PHUM PREL

SUBJECT: PRESS FREEDOM: MOROCCO NEEDS TO AVOID A BLACK EYE

REF: A. RABAT 406

- 1B. RABAT 498
- 1C. CASABLANCA 346
- 1D. CASABLANCA 230

Classified By: POL/C Timothy Lenderking for Reasons 1.4. (b) and (d)

11. (C) During a March 2 meeting with MFA Director of Bilateral Affairs Youssef Amrani, DCM raised freedom of the press in Morocco, noting that recent actions against journalists in Morocco (reflets) appeared at odds with the country's increasing democratization. It appeared the GOM was taking a different but no less damaging approach of levying heavy fines against offending journalists and periodicals rather than jailing journalists. This is seen as another way to punish journalists, and it gives Morocco a "black eye" in the view of the US and international community.

12. (C) DCM noted also that criteria for continuing eligibility in the Millennium Challenge Account demand that countries continue to promote reforms in political rights. Freedom of the press fell into that category.

13. (C) Amrani did not disagree with DCM's demarche but noted that all things are relative and the situation, while not perfect, is better than it was five years ago. Journalists were openly criticizing some of the King's actions, adopting an almost "le roi c'est moi" mentality; such things could not have been done in the past. That said, there had to be rules in addition to rights. Journalists needed to use their expanded freedoms in a positive way and go forward step by step. Instead, certain journalists (undoubtedly referring to the editors of Le Journal and TelQuel) continue to push the limits too forcefully.

14. (C) DCM agreed there had been progress in Morocco in the area of press freedom, and the US understood that. But progress generally did not make the headlines in press circles; government curbs on journalists did. This is the story that many outsiders take when the GOM moves against journalists.

15. (C) Amrani said it was the judicial system that decided how to respond to offending journalists. He relayed that when Le Journal attacked FM Benaissa for alleged corruption in Washington during his time as Morocco's Ambassador, Benaissa complained to the King. The King told Benaissa to let the courts handle the issue -- and the courts in Morocco ruled in Benaissa's favor in his suit against the magazine.

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